

U.S. VENDED POSTAL INSURANCE

1965-1985

A FAILED EXPERIMENT

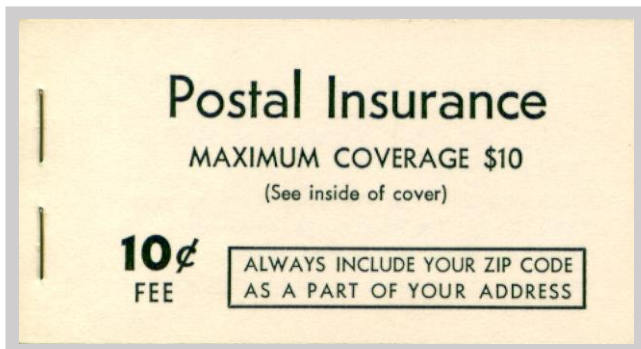
Background. A June 1965 Harris Poll found that 69% of Self-Service Post Office (SSPO) customers wanted access to postal insurance. On July 22, Postmaster General Gronouski announced, “As a result of the survey, we are presently undertaking a study to determine if postal insurance can be vended economically by machine.” On August 19, the first insurance booklet went on sale, beginning a 20-year experiment where the minimum amount of insurance could be purchased from a vending machine.

The Story. This exhibit presents a complete chronological study of vended postal insurance booklets and stamps. It tells a story of how they were produced, sold, and used. It is a story of how they were vended in relative obscurity and handled with confusion – post offices not following procedures and stamps used beyond valid dates. Finally, it is a story of how this experiment ended with scarcely a notice by the public or philatelic community. Although less than 5 million were sold over 20 years, insurance stamps are an important aspect of the history of Insured Mail and of the Postal Service’s effort to deliver customer convenience with 24-hour access of vended products.

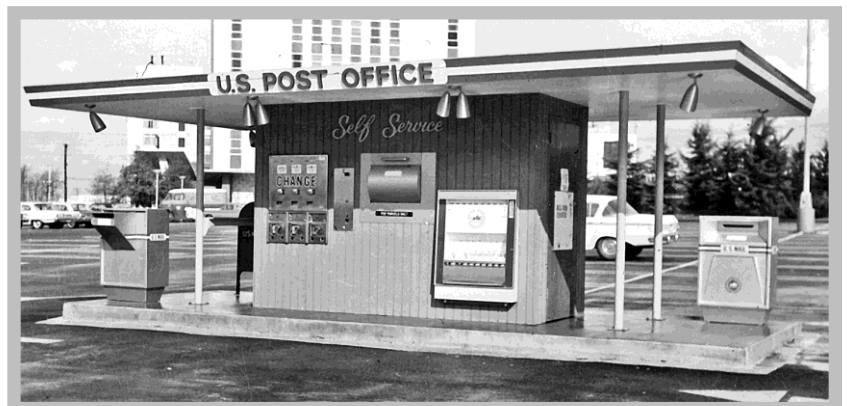
Content. The exhibit contains many scarce and hard to obtain items. There is an entire frame on the original 10-cent booklet. There are covers showing postal use of each insurance stamp. There’s extensive coverage of revalued booklets (some validated with a dated cancel). Also, production marks, box end labels, and pertinent SSPO material. Most preserved covers are philatelic in nature. Designed to insure parcels, examples of non-philatelic use are scarce. Key items are highlighted using **purple text or matting**. Revalued booklets documented by the original purchaser, are indicated with a star ★.

Research. The information and material shown in this exhibit represents a substantial advance over that previously available. The exhibitor conducted extensive research of original source material, including the archives of the BEP and USPS and the research files of several early collectors. This research led to several updates to the Scott catalog, notably a redesignation of “Insurance Labels” to “Insurance Stamps.”

Self-Service Post Office/Unit. The story of the postal insurance stamps is closely tied to the history of the SSPO/SSPU, the only place they were sold. Damage to the SSPOs, especially to the scales to weigh parcels, contributed to the insurance stamp demise.



First Insurance Booklet
4,786 sold



SSPO at Wheaton, Maryland – one of three
sites to sell the ten-cent booklet